



# *Iowa Outdoors*

Iowa Department of Natural Resources  
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**Feb. 13, 2007**

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[electronic photo available]

## **PHEASANTS TAKING WINTER IN STRIDE**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Snow, more snow, howling winds, and seemingly endless days of sub-zero wind chills. After nearly a month of the stuff, a lot of folks -- especially those in the northern half of the state -- are beginning to use the phrase *Long, hard winter*. It's only natural for outdoor enthusiasts to voice their concern over the welfare of local pheasant flocks.

Pheasants have become extremely visible as foraging flocks scratch and peck their way across Iowa's snowy landscape. The common questions become: Are pheasants starving to death? Are birds freezing? Are predators killing next spring's breeders?

Regardless of the species, there is no question that winter is a tough time for all wildlife. Just as spring is a time of renewal, winter is the time of loss. But not all winters are created equal. Generally speaking, open winters mean high [pheasant] survival. Deep snow for lots of days results in substantially increased mortality. Blizzards and ice storms are a pheasant's worst nightmare.

So how is this winter stacking up? According to DNR pheasant biologist, Todd Bogenschutz, it's a clear cut case of so far so good.

"Overall, it's been a pretty average winter for Iowa pheasants," says Bogenschutz. "Statewide, we've had around three to four weeks of continuous snow cover. During an average winter we get 7 to 8 weeks of snow cover, so things are pretty typical so far. We haven't had any blizzards yet, which is a real plus.

"During an average Iowa winter we'll lose 20 to 25 percent of our breeding hens. All things considered, I'd say that we're probably on par for hitting the average."

Although people often worry about the effects of prolonged sub-zero temperatures, cold in itself is pretty much a non-issue for pheasants, says Bogenschutz. As long as birds can locate adequate food supplies and secure roosting cover such as cattails or native grasses, they can easily withstand the coldest temperatures the Midwest has to offer.

"We currently have statewide snow cover and birds are concentrating around the best winter habitats. There's no question that pheasants have become very visible," says Bogenschutz. "But just because people see birds out foraging does not mean they are in trouble. I tell people that the pheasants are out there every day, you just don't see them when the ground is bare."

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## **NATURAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION, DNR PARTNER TO EXPAND WILDLIFE AREAS**

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has recently acquired two properties in northeast Iowa from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation that will expand two DNR managed areas.

A 10.8-acre tract of land, one-half mile south of Kendallville in northwest Winneshiek County, will become part of the adjacent 3,700-acre Upper Iowa Wildlife Management Area. The Natural Heritage Foundation purchased the land using a Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) grant for non-profit organizations, with the purpose eventually selling it to the DNR. The DNR paid \$35,250 for the land. The Natural Heritage Foundation contributed an additional \$12,000 for the property.

The Upper Iowa River marks the southeast boundary of the property. The land will allow access to the river and add protection of the river shoreline.

The DNR also acquired a 38-acre tract of land one-mile south of New Albin in northeast Allamakee County for the appraised price of \$82,080. The property will be added to the 600-acre Pool Slough Wildlife Management Area.

The land consists of the Mississippi River floodplain and will become part of a planned wetland development. The area will be managed for migrating waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds.

Both properties will remain on the county tax roll and will pay assessed property taxes.

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## **SNEAK PEAK AT SPRING FISHING**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Good to excellent crappie fishing and very good catfish numbers should greet anglers on Lake Macbride and Coralville Reservoir this season. Bluegills on Macbride will be plentiful, but small. That outlook was offered over the weekend by Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist Paul Sleeper. A near standing room only crowd at the Cedar Rapids/Iowa City Sports Show in Coralville heard Sleeper's update.

The Coralville-Macbride fishery is really a 'tale of two lakes.' Built in the 1950s, Coralville is an old reservoir, now; without a lot of bottom structure. Macbride, after renovation in 2001-02, has many 'new lake' features. "Generally, all species—except bluegills—have responded well to the renovation," observed Sleeper. "Increased habitat, better water quality; it's a better environment for fish." During renovation, crews created more 'vertical' habitat; scooping up bottom-silt and mounding it alongside. Rock was used to create more contours and hiding places for invertebrates and bait fish. "Until you lower the water, you can't re-form that lake bottom," reminded Sleeper. More than 100,000 tons of rock went into the project; armoring 12 miles of shoreline and created dozens of underwater structures.

Walleyes remained the mystery fish for anglers at the session. "We see a lot of walleyes, 15, up to 18 to 19 inches when we do population sampling in Macbride," reassured Sleeper. There are bigger ones, too, but he acknowledged that the six and seven pounders don't show up in creel surveys conducted each year. Anglers who try and fail to catch the popular game fish don't always buy into the forecast. That's because the walleyes are too well fed; gulping down a healthy supply of six to seven inch gizzard shad.

The shad create a solid food base in the Coralville Reservoir, but next door, Macbride's 940-surface acres are not enough for the shad and bluegills. "They are in competition for the same food--the microscopic zooplankton and insects," said Sleeper. "Predator fish will eat the little shad, but as they grow, they crowd the bluegill population, stunting *their* growth. You're going to see—and catch—lots of six inch bluegills, but not too many larger than that," cautioned Sleeper.

Crappies, on the other hand, benefit from the misplaced shad. "Crappie fishing will be real good this year (on Macbride). Lots of seven to nine inch fish, with some 12, 13 and 14-inchers not uncommon", said Sleeper. But the big ones are on the *reservoir* side of the dam. "Coralville should be excellent for crappies this year, if there is decent

water; not as muddy as it has been,” suggested Sleeper. “There are lots of 14 to 15-inch crappies in the Reservoir.”

Channel catfish get lots of attention in later June, as water temperatures hit 75 degrees. Your best bet? Poke around the steep, rocky banks of the Reservoir, and around the rock placements on Macbride. “For two or three weeks at the end of June, they’re concentrated on the rock,” said Sleeper. “Males are guarding the eggs laid by females. They’ll jump out at about anything you run by them.”

Largemouth bass fishing will be a little better on Macbride than Coralville in ’07. Sleeper says the lake renovation, finished in 2002, provided a lot more rock; which holds a lot of crawdads and other ‘bass food.’

‘Wipers,’ white bass/ocean-striped bass hybrids, create a stir every summer. “When we start getting calls that some one just caught a state record white bass, we know the wiper run has started,” said Sleeper. The big hybrids prey heavily on gizzard shad; a sight to see on a midsummer morning or evening. “When those one, one-and-a-half inch shad start feeding on the surface, the wipers will pound them,” relayed Sleeper. “The surface just explodes as they chase shad. Troll any kind of crankbait through the area.”

Since hybrids do not reproduce, those wipers are stocked. While fry are sometimes stocked, Sleeper says the best year classes come a couple seasons after *fingerlings* are stocked. Last year, 62,000 one-to-two inch wiper fingerlings were stocked.

One of the most heavily fished lakes in the state, Macbride (in combination with Coralville) figures to be the destination of thousands of anglers this year, too.

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## **PRIVATE LANDS TREES AND SHRUBS VITAL FOR STATE WILDLIFE HABITAT**

Planting native trees and shrubs or maintaining forested portions on Iowa’s private lands are key ingredients for successful and healthy wildlife populations. Plantings can range from songbird habitat in a backyard up to the woodlot in the back 40 acres.

“More than 300 species of wildlife have a link to Iowa’s forests, and with over 90 percent of Iowa’s forests in private ownership, private lands are key to wildlife habitat in Iowa,” said John Walkowaik, chief of the forestry bureau at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

“To maximize wildlife benefits on your land, no matter how big or small, landowners should vary the plant cover to create multi layer habitat. The layers should include native trees and shrubs with high wildlife values especially seed, berry and fruit producing plants. Another layer should consist of conifers or evergreens that provide an important source of winter cover for wildlife; and lastly establish living fence rows of trees, shrubs or vines to provide food, cover and travel lanes for wildlife,” Walkowiak said.

The State Forest Nursery, in Ames, provides specialty wildlife packets of native tree and shrub seedlings for private land plantings. The State Nursery has three wildlife packets of 200 native tree and shrub seedlings to cover one-quarter acre to up to one acre of land designed to meet the basic requirements of Iowa wildlife: Pheasant Packet; Quail Packet; and Wild Turkey Packet. Each packet sells for \$90.

The Nursery also offers the “Create-A-Wildlife Packet” which includes 50 each of up to 4 species of trees and or shrubs for \$90, which is perfect for someone with one-third to one acre of available area. “For those with a large backyard, we have a 20 tree and shrub Songbird packet of oak, pine, plum, chokecherry, dogwood and serviceberry that was designed in cooperation with Iowa Audubon that sells for \$20,” he said.

The State Forest Nursery can arrange delivery to your door for \$5 per 100 plants. For more information or to order conservation trees and shrubs from the State Forest Nursery call 1-800-865-2477 M-F 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or online at [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com). The Nursery accepts personal checks, and VISA or Master Card. Trees and shrubs will be available for shipping around the beginning of April until May 31.

For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.

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## **OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED FOR VOLUNTEERS WITH SPRING FEVER**

DES MOINES — Although winter is still making its presence felt, planning for spring is already well underway with new volunteer opportunities now available through the Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

- **National Archery in the Schools Program Event Opportunity:** DNR officials are looking for volunteers to help with the National Archery in the Schools Program Shoot at Hy-Vee Hall in Des Moines as part of the Iowa Deer Classic. This opportunity will take place March 3, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Volunteers will assist with scoring arrows and organizing archers. No

previous archery experience is required. For more information, contact Ben Berka at (515) 281-0140.

- **Prairie and Forest Management Opportunity:** Officials at Mines of Spain State Recreation Area are looking for volunteers to help with burning tall grass prairies, savanna, and forested areas in the park. This opportunity starts March 1 and ends June 30. For more information, contact Wayne Buchholtz at (563) 556-0620.
- **Grill Welding and Repair Opportunity:** Officials at Big Creek State Park are looking for volunteers to weld and repair broken campground and shelter outdoor cooking grills. This opportunity starts immediately and is ongoing until project completion. For more information, contact Kim Olofson at (515) 984-6473.
- **Campground Host Opportunity:** DNR officials are looking for dedicated volunteers to serve a favorite state park throughout the busy spring and summer camping season. Applications are currently being accepted. The following sites need one or more campground hosts: Lake Manawa, Lake Wapello, Dolliver, Lake Macbride, Pleasant Creek, Prairie Rose state parks, and Stephens State Forest campground. For more information contact Tricia Rummer at (515) 281-4539.
- **Water Quality Monitoring Opportunity:** DNR officials are preparing volunteers to help with water quality monitoring by offering training workshops throughout the state during April through August. For more information, contact Jacklyn Gautsch at (515) 205-8581.

Visit the Keepers of the Land website at [www.keepersoftheland.org](http://www.keepersoftheland.org) for information on these and more volunteer opportunities. For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at [Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us).

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## *Iowa Fishing Report*

[www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)

February 13, 2007

For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

### Northeast

**Lake Meyer** (Winneshiek): Fish are biting on any color jigs tipped with minnows or wax worms. Largemouth bass are hitting on minnows. Fish are scattered around the lake so keep moving around until you find them. There is about 8 inches minimum, of ice, but be careful around springs.

**Lake Hendricks** (Howard): Fish bite early in the day. Fishing has been mediocre to slow. Ice thickness averages 14 inches over most the lake. Use caution

around the aerator. Crappies, bluegill and a few bass and perch are being caught on jigs tipped with wax worms.

**Trout** streams are currently difficult to fish due to extreme low overnight temperatures. Streams may open up if we get warmer temperatures. Angling near spring heads is your best bet.

**For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.**

### **Southeast**

**Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19:** The majority of the boat ramps are iced in at this time. At the gauging station on **Pool 16** (Lock and Dam 16 – Muscatine) the water temperature is 32 degrees and the river pool state is 11.61 feet and is expected to remain stable over the next several days. Anglers are reminded to use caution and check ice conditions regularly as they venture out. River ice can often be variable even in backwaters and is not as strong as ice on farm ponds and lakes. On **Pool 16**, the backwaters at **Credit Island** and **Sunset Marina** have been fair for panfish. Ice fishing at **Big Timber** (Pool 17) has been fair for bluegill and crappies – with some sorting for sizeable fish. Anglers are also picking up panfish in the deeper boat harbor areas

**Lake Darling** (Washington): Good ice conditions are present. Midwinter conditions have slowed down the bite. Subzero morning temperatures did not help anglers either. Crappies are still around the cedar trees in the middle of the lake. The trick is finding the right one.

**Lake Belva Deer** (Keokuk): Good ice conditions are present. Fishing has slowed. The early morning hours are your best chances for catching some big bluegills

**Lake Geode** (Henry): Good ice conditions are present. Fish along the area across from the beach parking lot and the drop off across from the lower boat ramp.

**Lake Rathbun** (Appanoose): Crappies have been hitting on minnows and jigging type baits. The most productive areas have been in the coves of Honey Creek and Buck Creek. Areas with submerged cedar trees or stumps have been the most productive.

**Lake Wapello** (Davis): Bluegills and crappies have been biting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm. The best areas have been around the submerged cedar trees and pallet structures.

**Lake Sugema** (Van Buren): Bluegills and crappies have been hitting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm or a minnow. Areas with underwater habitat have been the most productive.

**Lake Miami** (Monroe): Bluegills and crappies have been hitting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm. The most productive areas have been on the north end of the lake among the stumps.

**Lake Macbride** (Johnson): Once again, anglers are catching lots of small bluegills and some small crappies. A few anglers are finding nice crappies on occasion. Bluegills can be caught off rock or wood habitat, while the crappies seem to prefer the newer wooden structures.

**Otter Creek** (Tama): Smaller bluegills and yellow bass are biting. Fish will either be associated to structure or suspended in 12 to 14 feet of water.

**Hannen Lake** (Benton): Bluegills and crappies are being taken from the brush piles. Look for the crappies in deeper water, while the bluegills are in a bit more shallow. Remember, minnows are not allowed at this lake.

**Rodgers Lake** (Benton): Bluegills between 7 and 9 inches are being taken from deeper brush piles.

**Diamond Lake** (Poweshiek): Anglers are having success with crappies here. Look for them in the deeper brush, or suspended in deeper water. Dusk and evenings have been effective times. Remember, minnows are not allowed at this lake.

**Kent Lake** (Johnson): Bluegills have been caught in and around structure, with a crappie or a bass as a bonus.

**For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.**

### **Southwest**

The ponds and lakes have around 12 inches of good ice.

**Don Williams** (Boone): Small crappies and bluegills are being caught on jigs tipped with wax worms.

**Hickory Grove** (Story): Medium-sized bluegills are being caught on wax worms and 7 to 9-inch crappies are being caught on minnows at dusk.

**Banner Lakes at Sunset Park** (Warren): The north lake is in the process of being renovated, so there are no fish in this lake. Trout should still be present and willing to bite in the south lake. Don't forget your trout stamp.

**Big Creek** (Polk): The best fishing has been at dusk. Small walleyes are hitting on jigs tipped with wax worms. Channel cats are biting on minnows fished near the bottom.

**Lost Lake** (Polk): Small bluegill and crappies are still being caught on small jigs tipped with wax worms or maggots. A few walleyes are being caught in the deeper water, near the bottom, using wax worms. Stinger hooks can help catch those finicky fish.

**Rock Creek** (Jasper): Anglers are catching 8-to-9 inch bluegills and 9-to-11 inch crappies from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. on wax worms and minnows.

**Lake Ahquabi and Hooper** (Warren): Nice bluegills and redear sunfish are being caught with small jigs and wax worms.

**Easter Lake** (Polk): Small bluegills and crappies are being caught on jigs tipped with wax worms.

Contact: Ben Dodd (515) 432-2823, Ext.108, for information on the above area lakes. For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

**Fogle** (Ringgold): Ice conditions are good. Bluegills and a few crappies are being caught in deeper water near structure with wax worms and minnows.

**Walnut Creek Marsh** (Ringgold): Ice conditions are good. The marsh has some open water from the winter aeration system. A few nice bluegills are being caught with wax worms on the edge of the dike trench.

**Wilson** (Taylor): Ice conditions are good. Nice bluegills are being caught near the dam on wax worms.

**Windmill** (Taylor): Ice conditions are good. A few bluegills and crappies are being caught near the dam and at a brush pile straight out from the boat ramp. No large



numbers of fish were reported, but the size of the fish being caught is making up for the numbers.

**East Lake Lenox** (Taylor): Ice conditions are good. Bluegills and a few small crappies are being caught in deep water next to the bottom with wax worms.

**West Lake Lenox** (Taylor): Ice conditions are good. Good numbers of bluegills are being caught in deep water with wax worms.

**Three Fires** (Taylor): Ice conditions are good. A few nice bluegills and crappies are being caught with wax worms and minnows. Best locations are near deep water structure or next to the drop in the channel.

**Icaria** (Adams): Ice conditions are good. A few nice bluegills and crappies are being caught with wax worms and minnows. Best locations are near deep water structure, next to the drop in the channel, and in the deep flats on the east end.

**Green Valley** (Union): Ice conditions are good. Few reports were given on Green Valley, but reports from those fishing Green Valley are that a few bluegills and crappies are being caught using wax worms and minnows in deeper water.

**Three Mile** (Union): Ice conditions are good. Good numbers of bluegills are being caught next to deep structure on wax worms. Crappies seem to be harder to find, but a few crappies are also being caught next to deep structure.

**Little River** (Decatur): Ice conditions are good. A few crappies and bluegills are being caught with wax worms and minnows.

**Slip Bluff** (Decatur): Ice conditions are good. Bluegills and a few crappies are being caught near brushy structure in deep water.

Contact: Gary Sobotka (641) 464-3108 for information on the above area lakes. For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

**Orient** (Adair): Fishing is good for 8-inch bluegill and 8-to-10 inch crappie.

**Greenfield** (Adair): Fishing is good for 8-inch bluegill. Teardrops tipped with a wax worm have been effective. A few crappies are being caught in evenings using minnows. Ice is 15 inches thick.

**Mormon Trail** (Adair): Fishing has been slow for bluegill and crappies. Ice is 15 inches thick.

**Nodaway** (Adair): Bluegills are fair using teardrops tipped with wax worms.

**Meadow** (Adair): A few crappies are being caught in the brush piles using minnows. Bluegills are fair using wax worms.

**Littlefield** (Audubon): No reports of fishing. Ice is 15 inches thick.

**Anita** (Cass): No report of fishing. Anita has a good population of 7-inch bluegill. Ice conditions are 15 inches.

**Manawa** (Pottawattamie): Ice is averaging 14 inches thick. A few wipers are being caught using large minnows on east side of the lake. Crappie fishing is fair on west side around Boy Scout Island. Try jigs tipped with small minnows.

**DeSoto Bend** (Harrison): Crappies fishing is good using jigs tipped with minnows around sunken brush piles on east side of lake.

**Prairie Rose** (Shelby): No reports of fishing at this time. Ice conditions are 15 inches.

**Willow** (Harrison): A few bluegills are being caught on teardrops tipped with wax worms.

**Farm Ponds:** Bluegill fishing has been good using wax worms. Crappies are fair using minnows in evenings. Ice conditions are good averaging 15 inches.

Contact: Bryan Hayes (712) 769-2587 for information on the above area lakes. For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

### **Northwest**

Ice conditions are good throughout west central Iowa, with 10-to-15 inches the norm. Use caution around the aeration systems at Black Hawk Lake in the Town Bay area and at Swan Lake, in Carroll County.

**Crawford Creek Lake (Ida):** Fishing is fair to good for 8-inch plus bluegills and 9-inch crappies.

**Swan Lake (Carroll):** Fishing is fair for 7-1/2-inch bluegill.

**Storm Lake (Buena Vista):** Walleye fishing is fair using live minnows or jigging lures tipped with a minnow head. Don't forget that all walleye between 17-22 inches must be released immediately.

**Brushy Creek Lake (Webster):** Angers are catching some bluegills, crappies and yellow perch, but overall fishing is slow. The main lake has ice between 8 and 14 inches thick, but there have been no ice thickness reports from the dam area.

**Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo):** Anglers are catching a few yellow bass in the mud flats around the Island. Walleye fishing has been slow. Anglers fishing the sunrise and sunset periods report some walleye action. Fish seem to be scattered across the mud flats and not relating to any particular structure. Fishing in water depths of 10 feet or greater is the best for walleye.

**Blue Pit – Lester Milligan Park (Cerro Gordo):** The third stocking of 1,500 trout took place on Feb. 9. Small jigs and wax worms fished just below the ice work the best. Trout seem to be near shore in the early morning and evening hours. Don't forget the trout fee.

**Indian Lake – Eldred Sherwood (Hancock):** Bluegills are hitting small teardrop jigs tipped with wax worms. Bluegill size has been 6-to-8 inches.

**For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.**